

Post Bulletin

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Navy Again in Danger as Symington Backers Push Air Force Superiority

WASHINGTON — Adm. Hillebrand, former Central Intelligence Agency chief, once remarked to me that in the entire history of the U.S. Navy, there had only been one mutiny. He was referring to the now half-forgotten "Revolt of the Admirals" in 1949, known at the Pentagon as "Operation 23." A group of admirals, led by Arthur W. Radford and Arleigh



Burke, banded together then to prevent Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington and his supporters from scuttling the Navy. Symington triumphed temporarily, halting work on the super-carrier, the USS Forrestal, and ramming through a vast building program for the obsolescent B-36, a giant and costly long-range bomber.

Today, lines of B-36s rust at Strategic Air Command bases — and "Symington's folly" has been reversed in favor of more balanced forces.

The Kennedy victory, and the emergence of Symington as the new administration's top defense

adviser, has reopened the controversy—and the Navy is again in danger.

NEW OFFENSIVE SET

A new offensive is being prepared by Symington's Pentagon supporters to cut the Navy down to a secondary or tertiary service and to make the Air Force dominant. In the name of "economy," the Air Force hopes to limit the Navy to the Polaris-armed atomic submarine, plus small supporting forces.

There is a certain irony to this. It was the Air Force that fought most bitterly to "kill the Polaris program"—the argument being that I-based intercontinental and immediate ballistic missiles made pocket submarines unnecessary. The fabulous success of our atomic submarines and the Polaris missile has undercut this argument, for it has become apparent even to the most doctrinaire military mind that the Polaris submarine is perhaps the most effective weapon in our arsenal.

The Air Force propaganda line now is that the Polaris submarine is great, but that carriers, missile-armed cruisers, and other surface forces are useless in a nuclear age.

The underlying flaw in the Air Force contention, however, is that it bases U.S. military strategy and tactics solely on the possibility of all-out war. It is essential to maintain a deterrent force of ICBMs and IRBMs, if only to disabuse the Soviets of the idea that they can deliver a quick knockout blow. But in the protracted conflict between East and West, the Navy's destroyers, cruisers, aircraft carriers, and auxiliary ships are a vital element of our defense.

"Brushfire" wars, in which Communists excel, are not fought with hydrogen bombs. In fact, there are few responsible world leaders who believe all-out nuclear war is a factor in Communist strategic

plans. The Navy, by contrast, is useful in the world, helps keep the peace by patrolling the seas. Its incomparable value was demonstrated during the Korean War when it made the waters around Japan an American lake. It was again demonstrated when President Eisenhower moved decisively to prevent the Communist takeover of Lebanon by landing Marine detachments. It has kept the Formosa Straits and the Mediterranean safe for the West.

SCREEN IN CARIBBEAN

And when Fidel Castro planned an invasion of Central America, it was the U.S. fleet that interposed itself between the would-be aggressors and the anti-Castro Latin American nations, thereby setting up a screen in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean situation is perhaps the most dramatic example of the Navy's irreplaceable role. For the Air Force would have been hapless to stop the flow of men and munitions to Central America except by bombing Cuban ships and Cuban beachheads. This could well have precipitated a shooting war in which Cuba would have rallied the support of the Soviet Union and Red China, converting the Caribbean island into another Korea.

The Navy, preventing an invasion by its mere presence, stopped Fidel Castro dead in his tracks without firing a shot. It was a salutary demonstration both to the Cuban dictator and to his Communist bosses.

Nevertheless, the Air Force wants to scrap what has repeatedly been a shield of the republic. An intensive campaign to discredit the Navy, to show that its operations are "wasteful" and its strategic concepts old-fashioned, is well under way. At the Pentagon the fighting has been unremitting and will continue to be so. The Air Force has begun to mount its publicity by feeding material to columnists and friendly newspapermen.